The Think.Check.Submit campaign

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The Think.Check.Submit campaign is led by a number of stakeholders from across the scholarly publication sector, who came together following concerns about what they termed "deceptive publishers" and who recognise the value of providing guidance to support researchers in selecting a trustworthy journal to submit their work to. I was invited to represent librarians on this group. The resource that we developed was launched in October 2015 and is available at www.thinkchecksubmit.org. It's a checklist of questions that researchers might usefully consider when they are preparing to submit a paper to a journal. Obtaining answers to the questions should help researchers identify the quality indicators that they need to feel confident that the publisher of the journal they select will provide a professional service, adding value throughout the publication process and ensuring the widest reach and visibility for their new addition to the scholarly debate.

The campaign reminds publishers to check their own practices and assess the ease with which researchers can identify their quality indicators. It also highlights to other groups from across the sector, eg, DOAJ, ISSN, that their approval of membership or allocation of publication identifiers may be interpreted as an endorsement of a new publisher by industry experts and reinforces the importance of stricter criteria and more rigorous checks than ever before.

Proliferation of new titles, or, the jungle of journals

Think.Check.Submit. is aimed at early career researchers but will also be useful to anyone helping this group navigate the scholarly communication landscape. Those of us whose roles include support for researchers know that authors often have target journals in mind when writing a paper. I've also seen a few examples of journal lists created by certain disciplines or university departments to guide submissions. However, despite established conventions and practices, it's clear from the requests for advice that we receive in my team that ECRs lack trust in some journals and are looking for guidance. Those of us who know that the number of new scholarly journals increases each year (by more than 1000 titles per year according to STM's 2015 report) or keep an eye on the emergence of new publishers and innovative publishing models follow these developments with a professional interest in the evolving scholarly communication landscape. Researchers faced with the unfamiliar often react differently. We see varying reactions from researchers across career stages and across disciplines, from passionate advocates of new models to fierce resistors of any titles other than a long established 'top journal' and a strong belief in the notion that new publishers – especially open access publishers – are 'predatory'.

Framework for interaction

The researchers who contact my team at the University of Manchester are seeking reassurance. We've recently been asked, "How can I know whether this site is a predatory journal or not? I need some information before my decision" and "Will you please guide me about the below publisher and its journals, whether it is real or predatory." Think.Check.Submit. doesn't tell researchers which journals or publishers aren't trustworthy. In part this is because 'black lists' are largely subjective and difficult to maintain but a key aim of the campaign is to encourage early career researchers to develop the habit of applying quality criteria when assessing journals. Thus academic freedom remains with the researcher and they are encouraged to investigate potential journals further and submit only to a journal that they trust. The intention isn't only to help researchers gauge the trustworthiness of new titles and new publishers but the checklist also highlights the means by which publishers display their trustworthiness to potential authors. This is a timely initiative since as the emphasis on article level metrics continues to build momentum researchers may be willing to shift their emphasis from Journal Impact Factors as the main proxy for quality.

International reach

Think.Check.Submit. will be of interest to the international research community. At Manchester over 90% of the enquiries we receive are from international researchers. We've even been contacted by a repository administrator ("what criteria is (sic) used to determine a predatory publisher. Your advice would be greatly appreciated . . ."ceaux).

We've already added a link to the Think.Check.Submit. to our open access webpages now and we'll continue to signpost the simple guidance in the publication strategy support we provide for University of Manchester researchers. We're planning to pass the details on to the university's researcher development teams to ensure a consistent message and to increase awareness of the resources across campus. We're also sharing the resource with international researchers who don't seem to have access to the type of research support we provide in their own institution and who contact us for advice. We're pleased to support the initiative and hope you'll use the tool and/or get involved with the campaign too.

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